

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 001692

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS  
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY  
NSC FOR MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/01/2013  
TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL UK NP  
SUBJECT: NEPAL: AMBASSADOR URGES PARTIES TO TURN OFF  
POTENTIALLY VIOLENT RALLY; SEEK UNDERSTANDING WITH PALACE

REF: A. KATHMANDU 1674

1B. KATHMANDU 1612  
1C. KATHMANDU 1664

Classified By: AMB. MICHAEL E. MALINOWSKI. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

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SUMMARY  
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11. (S) Ambassador Malinowski, accompanied by British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield, had separate discussions with party leaders and the Prime Minister on August 31 and September 1 in an effort to head off a potentially violent all-party demonstration planned for September 4 (Ref A). The Indian Ambassador carried the same message in his own meetings with the party chiefs. The Ambassadors emphasized that the August 27 break in the ceasefire offers a fresh opportunity for the parties and the Palace to reconcile. The party leaders committed to scale back the planned protest but emphasized that they were seeking a sign from the Palace, in return, indicating a willingness to reconsider reviving Parliament and/or establishing an all-party government. Amb. Bloomfield said that he would communicate the message to King Gyanendra, currently in the UK for medical tests. End summary.

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DOUBLING UP DIPLOMATICALLY;  
US, UK AMBASSADORS IN FULL-COURT PRESS ON PARTIES  
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12. (C) On August 31 and September 1, the US and UK Ambassadors (together) and the Indian Ambassador (in his own meetings) teamed up to send a strong joint message to the political parties to call off the massive anti-government protest planned for September 4 (Ref A). The Ambassadors stressed in their meetings with party leaders that the break in the ceasefire makes it likelier than ever that the Maoists will try to infiltrate the protest, thereby virtually guaranteeing significant violence. They emphasized that it is the wrong time to place additional pressure on either the Government of Nepal (GON) or the thinly stretched security forces, who, after three assassination attempts by the Maoists in the capital over the past week, cannot be diverted to provide security for a mass rally. Should the rally turn violent and the GON move firmly to quell it, the confrontation could complicate possibilities for rapprochement between the parties and the Palace.

13. (S) On August 31 the Foreign Secretary told the Ambassador that the GON was planning to issue a ban on all public rallies in the capital. The Ambassador said that no one could object to the ban if its purpose is to ensure safety and security in the capital, but asked that the GON not surprise the parties by issuing it without alerting them beforehand. Later the same day, the Ambassador, accompanied by UK Ambassador Keith Bloomfield, met with Nepali Congress President and former Prime Minister G.P. Koirala. The Ambassadors reported indications from the Palace that King Gyanendra (now in the UK for a medical check-up) may be reconsidering reviving Parliament for a certain period and with a limited mandate and/or setting up an all-party government. They cautioned, however, that the planned September 4 rally could derail such progress toward a political understanding with the Palace. The envoys warned of intelligence indicating that the Maoists plan to hijack the rally for their own ends.

14. (S) While no one disputes the right to free assembly, the Ambassadors said, holding such a rally now--after the Maoists' decision to break the ceasefire with violence (and the subsequent assassination attempts, including on two former Nepali Congress figures)--would be nothing short of irresponsible. Friendly countries, they emphasized, would not understand such behavior on the part of democratic leaders who should be working with the GON against the Maoists. A Nepali Congress decision to push the rally to the detriment of national security would negatively affect how the US Embassy views the party in the future, the Ambassador

noted. The party should not back itself into a corner but should seize this opportunity to pursue rapprochement with the Palace. Both envoys urged Koirala to reconsider holding the protest.

15. (S) Koirala, who seemed refreshingly flexible and uncharacteristically amenable to reason, conceded the danger of violence. A Parliament limited both in duration and agenda--but with a mandate to negotiate with the Maoists and to hold general elections--could be acceptable, he said. He asked if the King could send a message, either public or private, from London indicating his openness to the idea. UK Ambassador Bloomfield said he would attempt to obtain such a message.

16. (S) The Ambassador then spoke by telephone with Madhav Nepal, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML), about the rally and the likelihood of reconciliation with the Palace. Nepal confirmed that a Palace representative had floated a similar plan with the party (Ref A) and said that the UML would attempt to modify the September 4 program in view of security concerns. The parties might hold separate programs on that day in different locations to cut down on traffic in the capital, he suggested. He said that he, like Koirala, was open to reconciliation with the Palace (although he prefers an all-party government to restoration of Parliament). Like Koirala, he is also seeking some sign or message from the Palace confirming the openness is mutual.

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PM PREDICTABLY LESS ENTHUSIASTIC  
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17. (C) On September 1 the Ambassador, again accompanied by the British Ambassador, met with Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa. Ambassador-at-large Bekh Thapa also participated in the meeting (Ref C). PM Thapa said the security forces were reviewing the scope of the as-yet unissued ban on assemblies. (Note: A notice was issued later that day banning public assemblies of more than five people in all three districts in the Kathmandu Valley until September 23. End note.) The Ambassadors briefed Thapa on their efforts to dissuade the political parties from holding the rally and on the parties' interest in reaching a political settlement with the Palace. While welcoming the news of the parties' apparent openness to modifying their program, he was somewhat less enthusiastic about either the prospect of an all-party government or a revived Parliament (both of which scenarios would, implicitly, require his resignation). It might be improper for the King to send a message from a foreign country, he quibbled, for (unspecified) reasons of protocol.

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PARTIES' COMPROMISE:  
DECENTRALIZED PROGRAM  
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18. (U) On September 2 the five parties who had been planning the September 4 rally, citing "the current critical and sad situation of the breakdown of the ceasefire and peace talks," announced a modified program of protest. Instead of having one massive rally in Kathmandu, the parties have decided to hold a peaceful non-cooperation program in the capital (which would nonetheless defy the curfew), with additional protests at the district level. What exactly will constitute the non-cooperation program was not spelled out in the press statement.

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WAITING FOR A MESSAGE FROM LONDON  
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19. (C) After an all-party meeting on September 2, Nepali Congress Central Committee member Dr. Suresh Chalise and Sujata Koirala, daughter of the Party President, met with the Ambassador to brief him on the parties' decision and to inquire if a message had been received from the King. In light of the security concerns posed by the break in the ceasefire, the parties had decided to pare down the scale of the planned protest, they reported. Party workers were no longer being asked to travel to Kathmandu from across the country, they said, and were being told instead to hold their own separate programs in their own districts. Nonetheless, the Kathmandu rally may attract "ten or twenty thousand," they claimed. (Comment: We think this is very optimistic. End comment.) The program in Kathmandu would be primarily "symbolic," Sujata said, aimed at demonstrating the parties' "non-cooperation" with the GON. Now that the Nepali Congress leadership had put its credibility on the line by dissuading its party workers (whom they described as eager to die for democracy) from participating in the rally, it was all the more important for the King to send a message from London. Otherwise, how could they pacify their zealous party cadres? The Ambassador emphasized that the British Ambassador had committed to trying to obtain such a message; if, how and

when such a message might be obtained cannot be certain. It is important to remain focused on the goal of political reconciliation, he stressed, and not to allow possible fall-out from the rally to undermine the prospects for progress. The parties do not want a confrontation, Sujata said, and are actually seeking a way out. She added that the pair would be visiting the British Ambassador later in the afternoon. (Note: They did. End note.)

110. (S) On September 2 the Indian Ambassador told Ambassador Malinowski that he had contacted royal confidant Prabhakar Rana, now en route to London to meet the King, to urge that the monarch send the desired message to the parties. Rana reportedly said he would convey the request.

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COMMENT  
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111. (S) Despite the Nepali Congress claims that hordes of party workers are only too eager to protest, we suspect the parties would welcome a face-saving device that would avert almost certain Maoist-instigated violence and a confrontation with the government. Both the Nepali Congress (with a Party President more affable and accommodating than we can recall in more than two years) and the UML seem ready to consider several options--as long as those options contain one crucial component: an overture from the King. In the parties' view, the ball is squarely in the royal court.

MALINOWSKI